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SUBJECT: FRENCH READOUT ON KOUCHNER VISIT TO MOSCOW

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. An MFA interlocutor related that the September 18 meeting between French Foreign Minister Kouchner and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov did not prompt any breakthroughs on the sensitive issues of Kosovo or Iran, but the tone of the meeting--their first as foreign ministers--was "honest" and strong enough to support France's increased emphasis on confronting human rights abuses. Lavrov expressed interest in maintaining close communication on the issues of NATO and Russia/EU bilateral relations, particularly in light of the upcoming French EU presidency. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Pol M/C Rosenblatt and Poloff met on September 20 with MFA Cabinet Counselor for Russia, Balkans, CIS Isabelle Dumont for a resume of Foreign Minister Kouchner's September meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. Dumont related that the visit had not generated any progress on the most contentious issues--Kosovo and Iran--but that the two ministers had established an "honest" rapport that would bear the weight of the French government's increased determination to address sensitive--and heretofore largely ignored--issues like human rights abuses. Dumont noted that the Russians voiced no discomfort with Kouchner's visiting the offices of the newspaper where murdered journalist Anna Polikovskaya had worked. Lavrov's warm personal reception of Kouchner--he never mentioned the "brutality" characterization Sarkozy applied to Russian behavior during his August 27 speech--contrasted with his public comments at the post-meeting press conference where the Russian foreign minister was noticeably more stiff and dogmatic.

¶3. (C) Dumont said Lavrov expressed interest in maintaining close communication on the issues of NATO and Russia/EU bilateral relations, commenting that his government looked to France's EU presidency during the second half of 2008 as an opportunity to improve that relationship. Dumont said the French welcomed the prospect of improving relations but had not as yet planned any specific initiatives and would be open to suggestions, including from the United States, for projects with that goal in mind. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at: <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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